

Motivating Learners AND Lecturers

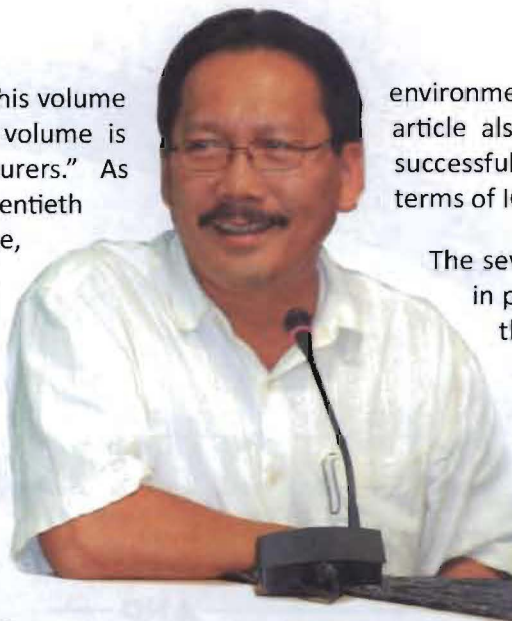


DEAN'S MESSAGE

I wish to welcome all readers to this volume of INSIGHT. The theme of this volume is "Motivating Learners and Lecturers." As UNIMAS strives forward in its twentieth year in pursuit of excellence, motivation is indeed crucial factor in ensuring quality teaching and producing outstanding graduates. Research and literature have shown that having high motivation will enhance students' desire to learn and thus result in more meaningful and successful learning. Highly motivated lecturers also prepare and deliver better quality instruction. Therefore, this issue of INSIGHT aims to explore the issue of "Motivating Learners and Lecturers" from the perspectives of the literature and also through the sharing of knowledge and experiences among lecturers in UNIMAS.

The first four articles focus directly on the theme of this issue. The first article defines motivation, discusses various motivational theories and looks at key factors influencing motivation among educators and learners. To motivate students, the article discusses a number of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that contribute to students' motivation to learn, and it tied the discussions to Student-Centred Learning (SCL), a teaching and learning paradigm that the university hopes will be widely used in tertiary teaching. The second article shares experiences regarding ways lecturers can motivate students, and suggests conditions essential for teachers' motivation. Culturing and maintaining subject enthusiasm that can uplift motivation is the thrust of the third article. The fourth article, on the other hand, provides a unique perspective about our personal motivational efforts, and it invites us to examine the importance of pastoral care as a meaningful source of motivation for student learning.

The fifth article, details the progression of blended e-learning initiatives at Unimas, and proposes several interesting ideas to ensure that our e-learning spaces are exciting and motivating for both students and lecturers. In the same spirit, the sixth article is a sharing of experiences on how the author enhances the blended e-learning



environment to motivate his own students. The article also discusses technical pre-requisites of successful learning via Morpheus, specifically in terms of ICT infrastructure.

The seventh article, builds the case for putting in place the human and non-human factors that contributes to an outstanding university, one that future, present and past students are proud to be associated with as their alma mater. It envisions that, once students feel themselves to be part of a great institution, their motivation to learn will be enhanced. Key factors that are associated with an outstanding university are also suggested.

Last but not least, the final article, provides an interesting perspective about motivation. It talks about teaching as a personal journey. Using the metaphor "going into the woods," the author sets the idea that no two lecturers' experiences are ever the same. Nonetheless, all these different personal journeys will be a rewarding one if lecturers choose to make the best of what the journey has to offer. It is an inspirational article that urges lecturers to be forward looking and to continuously develop themselves so that they can be proud of themselves now and when they have to "leave the woods."

I wish to thank all contributors to this issue of INSIGHT. I am sure you will find the articles useful and interesting. In continuation from the theme of this issue, the next issue of INSIGHT (Volume 19) will focus on the theme "Inclusive Teaching." We would like to invite you, as contributors, to discuss issues related to inclusive teaching, in terms of how we address the uniqueness among students from diversified backgrounds and learning experiences. Your article may take the form of a summary of research output, an anecdotal account of personal experience in the classroom, or a critical analysis of certain topics or issues related to the theme. We look forward to receive your contributions soon.

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MOTIVATING STUDENTS' & LECTURERS' BEST WORK

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Motivation can be viewed as internally or externally generated forces that enable a person to act or get involved in an activity. The task of determining what forces actually motivate individuals is enormously complex due to the nature of these motivators coming from different sources (social, biological, history, cognitive, environment) which may significantly vary from person to person. Most routine things in life however do not really require any motivation on the individual doing the act and we all do these things on a daily basis in order to prevent unpleasant feelings or pain (i.e. eating to avoid hunger, getting up in the morning to prevent headache from oversleeping, brushing teeth to inhibit tooth decay, and going to school or work). Motivation becomes a topic of serious concern when a desired or planned outcome is not being satisfied according to expectations of internal or external forces (i.e. higher productivity, improved performance, better grades). Educational psychology states that, motivation, in most part, is divided into two distinct types; internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) motivation. The source of intrinsic motivation comes from within the person who feels no pressure from outside; however, extrinsic motivation relies more on the external environment than how a person feels towards a particular task or activity that needs to be performed. It is crucial to recognize that all individuals are motivated through innumerable needs and what motivates you to act may not be sufficient to motivate somebody else, and vice versa; nevertheless, monetary rewards, power and praise are usually enough to motivate majority of people.

Steven Covey, author of “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”, once said, “Seek first to understand, and then to be understood.” Therefore, communication in general, but more importantly business communication, comes even before any motivation related work can start because effective communication is the key to motivating others. As Albert Einstein said it perfectly, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them,” so it means that we have to think differently and analyze the needs of those who we want to motivate. A manager’s, a teacher’s, and an administrator’s ability to communicate effectively and to make sure that the message is clearly understood by the intended receivers is absolutely vital in today’s business environment. I know from my professional experience that effective communication always ranks high among all the necessary skills to achieve true success in business. Verbal and nonverbal communication barriers can adversely affect one’s rare chance of any personal and professional accomplishment in life. Thus, being a good motivator starts with first being a good communicator. Communicating effectively (teachers, administrators, managers, and students) can have the desired impact on reaching critical goals such as; getting the job you want; being promoted in the current job; leading others through motivation; enhancing job performance; building positive relationships; and creating a cohesive prosperous organization where everyone is happy, motivated and productive.

Terrel Howard Bell, the Secretary of Education in the Cabinet of President Ronald Reagan, once said; “There are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation.” We also use a similar analogy for the first-time English learners; three basic rules exist for speaking perfect English; practice, practice, and practice. Lai (2011) believes that motivation refers to reasons that underlie behavior that is characterized by willingness and volition. There is so much material out there on the topic of motivation; in fact, so many suggestions like ‘how to motivate in 20 ways,’ ‘25 steps to motivate teachers,’ or ‘top 10 ways to motivate your students.’ Interestingly, they all talk about similar things, but my personal experience over 20 years as a professional and several years as an educator tells a totally different story. I know that there is no ‘one fits all’ formula when it comes to motivating yourself, an employee, a manager, a teacher or a student. Motivating yourself and others is much more complex than how it is portrayed; therefore, it requires careful analysis and use of skills on the part of the motivator. Though, it is absolutely clear that a person who is doing the motivating needs to be aware of some techniques used in several renowned theories; such as, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, incentive theory, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Herzberg’s two-factor theory, and the 16 basic desires theory.

A number of motivation theories have been around for at least two centuries and they all have distinct variations as to how one becomes motivated. For instance, Mayo (1880-1949), on the contrary of Taylor (1856-1917), believed that there was more to motivation than monetary rewards and individuals were better motivated when their belonging needs (i.e. love, friendship, social interconnectedness) were satisfied; however, Taylor insisted that salary is the single most motivating factor for employees to go to work every day. Maslow (1908-1970) on the other hand, which is my personal favorite, argued that needs of people are structured hierarchically just like a pyramid containing lower and higher level needs. The theory also claims that most basic level of needs must be fully satisfied before the individual can move onto meeting higher level needs. According to Maslow, for example, a homeless person cannot be reasonably expected to think about satisfying a higher level need (belonging or esteem) when he/she is dreadfully more concerned about satisfying more basic needs as food, water, and shelter trying to stay alive (physiological needs). Maslow also states that the process continues until all unsatisfied needs are met; however, certain events can occur in a person’s life resulting a sudden change of his/her current position either upward or downward in the hierarchy of needs pyramid. For example, winning a lottery or inheriting a large sum of money can easily move a person from a lower level need (i.e. physiological) to a higher level need (i.e. esteem), and vice versa. Herzberg was very close to Maslow in his thinking but he thought that there was more to motivation than just having a mixture of needs categorized and grouped into five levels. So, Herzberg came up with the two-factor theory, which says that people are specially motivated through two sets of factors; motivators as in intrinsic (e.g. praise, challenge, higher responsibility) and hygiene factors as in extrinsic (salary, position, status, and other fringe benefits).

Intrinsic motivation studies have been conducted nearly four decades. Lai (2011) asserts that motivation within individuals tends to vary across subject areas, and this domain specificity increases with age; moreover, intrinsic motivation is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure. Intrinsically motivated students or lecturers are more interested in intangible aspects of an activity or an event rather than tangible rewards. Therefore, intrinsic motivation exists within the person and it is the by product of his/her intentions of positive feelings that have to do with willingness to learn new things, enjoy mastering different subject matters, feel self-fulfillment, and engage in activities to improve personal skills which later turn into a life-long learning habit without facing any pressure from the external environment. Students and lecturers with intrinsic attributes like autonomy, and they enjoy being in control of their own destiny. They believe possessing the necessary skills will effectively get them to the planned, desired, or targeted outcome. Furthermore, intrinsic efforts rely more on actual work than luck or other spiritual forces.

Extrinsic motivation, on the contrary of intrinsic, is more result oriented and driven by external factors; and according to Lai (2011), it is governed by reinforcement contingencies. The performance of an activity and the attainment of goals are more important than the actual feelings of participants. Competition, monetary rewards and fear of punishment are more obvious components of extrinsic motivation. However, trying to motivate someone who possesses intrinsic attributes based on extrinsic motivators can demotivate the individual, it is also true other way around. Students with extrinsic attributes like to win competitions by beating others and they are extra motivated if there is a cash reward, a good grade, or a trophy at the end for the winner. Incentive theory plays a significant role for extrinsic motivation as long as the incentives are in terms of tangible prices (i.e. money, car, house, or other material instruments) not intangible rewards (for instance, praising, awarding a title, or simply feeling of satisfaction). Extrinsically motivated individuals would get an enormous sense of joy for being at the centre of things and being cheered by spectators after winning a competition.

Motivating Lecturers' Best Work

Everything revolves around teachers, who build cities through the brilliant work of architects, heal people through the magical hands of doctors, construct roads, bridges through the ingenuity of engineers, and create civilizations through the self-actualized leaders. Teachers are simply the most essential part of the past, present and future; moreover, they are the central part of university environment. Aristotle once said, "Those who know, do. Those that understand, teach." William Arthur Ward explained the benefits of great teachers, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Alexander the Great through the words of, "I am indebted to my father for living, but to my teacher for living well," showed gratifying appreciation for his teachers. Most scholars, professionals, parents, governments, and societies at large strongly believe that education, especially tertiary education, provides important economic and social benefits to everyone involved. Robert B. Zoellick, President of the World Bank Group 2010, said that "Improved learning leads to better jobs, greater productivity, and higher incomes in every society." Barbara Ischinger, Director for Education – OECD, points out "Education has always been a critical investment for the future, for individuals, for economies and for societies at large." Therefore, future rests on the shoulders of passionate university lecturers who can make an everlasting difference by positively impacting the lives of young ladies and gentlemen.

Teachers are irrefutably the most important group of professionals for our nation's future. Therefore, it is disturbing to find that many of today's teachers are dissatisfied with their jobs (Bishay, 1996). As Taylor suggested that salary, as an incentive, can motivate many employees, however most research findings on the contrary shows that pay incentives have been unsuccessful in increasing university lecturers' motivation because having the passion and being passionate about teaching are far more important for lecturers than receiving monetary rewards. Sylvia and Hutchinson (1985) claim that university lecturers are more motivated through intrinsic elements such as freedom of choice, being in control and having autonomy which in turn fosters creativity, better performance and a higher degree of job satisfaction. Greenwood and Soars (1973) believe that teachers feel positive about their job and they are more motivated when students engage in more classroom discussions which lead to other important higher order of needs (social relations, esteem, and actualization). Rothman (1981) suggests that teachers who are satisfied with their teaching performance are better recognized by their students who see them more as role models than just teachers.

Being an educator, unlike any other job, requires motivators like; a high degree of creativity, innovation, effective communication and a wide range of other important attributes. As teachers, what you do and how you teach can positively or negatively impact the fragile lives of young students; therefore, teachers have an enormous responsibility as well as a unique opportunity to figure out the best way to motivate students. As Maslow would have pointed out, lecturers are motivated by higher level needs; recognition, responsibility, and achievement (esteem needs or intrinsic motivation). Furthermore, lecturers are also motivated by flexible university policies, existence of interpersonal relations, effective administration, and working conditions (hygiene factors or extrinsic motivation). Although having appropriate level or more of hygiene factors would not increase lecturers' motivation; however, reduced or insufficient amount of hygiene factors can certainly demotivate them. Robbins and Coulter (2003) argue that

hygiene factors do not motivate employees; instead, administrators should emphasize intrinsic factors or motivators to increase job satisfaction. Existence of a good relationship (belonging and social needs) between lecturers and school administrators along with colleagues can increase lecturers' motivation. Research findings show that lecturers are better motivated when they are provided with time, flexibility and autonomy to design the courses they teach (esteem needs). Receiving credit and acknowledgement of their effort and hard work not only motivate lecturers but it also inspires others to follow the same path. Lecturers' achievements recognized in the community and getting promoted to an executive administrator role (i.e. dean of business school) can also be a huge motivating factor (self-actualization).

Motivating Students' Best Work

The task of creating a favorable environment where students are highly motivated is probably the most challenging part of being a lecturer because most of the students come from different backgrounds with a wide range of motivations and expectations influenced by past experiences in their lives. Because university lecturers have very little or no control over students' behavioral choices, then it becomes entirely up to the instructors to design the courses in such a way to foster students' motivation. As a starter, lecturers need to recognize which students are intrinsically and which students are extrinsically motivated. This will help lecturers to develop those students who are intrinsically motivated to become life-long learners because students in this category do not pay attention to external pressure and they are always interested in learning new knowledge to satisfy their curiosity; moreover, intrinsically motivated students enjoy autonomy and being in control of their destiny. The expectancy-value theory suggests that the students can be successful as long as they put in the required time and effort to complete academic tasks and appreciate the value as well.

“The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates.

The great teacher inspires.”

William Arthur Ward

Just like lecturers, it is important to are motivated through intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (power, money, possible to offer in a university setting,

based on attaining good outcome (good grades) and punishing those with poor performance (bad grades). Self-determination and autonomy are most noticeable characteristics of intrinsically motivated students who do not need much motivation because they are genuinely interested in the true process of learning rather than just receiving good grades. Therefore, lecturers need to recognize students with intrinsic attributes because these students would be easily demotivated if good grades are presented to them by the lecturer as a way of motivation. Students with intrinsic motivation believe that things are under their control and they have the skills that will help them reach desired goals. Reinforcing intrinsic values such as praise, recognition, curiosity and thirst for knowledge can turn intrinsically motivated students into life-time learners.

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Research findings show that most students are highly motivated to learn when they are actively involved in the teaching/learning process; thus, lecturers can try to take advantage of student-centered learning paradigm (SCL) instead of using more traditional method of lecturer-centered learning (LCL). In student-centred learning, instead of being told what to do by their lecturers and given a set of instructions to follow, students are directly and actively involved discovering new knowledge through experience where they often have to collaborate, cooperate, compete (at times), and share information with other fellow students. Although this style of learning could be considered by some students challenging (because SCL encourages students to use their imagination and full capacity to be creative, and sometimes it forces them to think outside the box), various research papers on the topic show that most students however prefer this type of learning anyway because they say that they feel flexibility and empowerment to develop their current knowledge to invent new and better ways. This is not saying by any means that the students in SCL are totally left on their own to achieve learning by themselves; lecturers still play an important role as a coach/facilitator to make sure that the students

are organized and grouped well to work together cohesively. However, probably the most challenging role of lecturers in SCL is to develop creative ways to evaluate the learning outcome with the involvement of the students. The most positive part of this teaching and learning style is that lecturers and students learn, develop, and discover together as part of the same team (Taskinsoy, 2012). It makes a huge difference in motivation as to how lecturers design and teach the course, which can either motivate or demotivate students who come from various backgrounds with different expectations; some are concerned about getting good grades (extrinsic), others are driven by interest and pleasure in the learning activity itself and not concerned about grades (intrinsic). However, almost all students are motivated when their lecturers provide clear instructions and expectations about the course. Moreover, students always like when they receive timely feedback regarding their status in the course, which means that the results of quizzes, tests, midterms and homework have to be announced in a reasonably short time. Lecturers with a great deal of professional experience come handy in providing interesting real life experiences which foster intrinsic motivation that enables students to become very interested in the subject matter. This way, students feel being part of something real rather than the textbook material (belonging needs), which may be viewed as boring and not essential by some students. Even though it is pretty common sense to everyone, but it would help mention again that all students appreciate when lecturers are open-minded and they approach students with respect; in addition, lecturers must keep in mind that students do not just see them as someone who provides lectures, but see them as potential role models.

There are advantages and disadvantages to every theory; therefore, lecturers must consider them before utilizing such theories. For instance, intrinsic motivation develops students to become life-time learners which is a huge advantage; however as the disadvantage, according to DeLong and Winter (2002), the theory's focus on the subject matter rather than rewards or punishments makes it a time consuming process which may be considered slow to change behavior. Students who are intrinsically motivated may ask themselves the kind of questions like "does this subject interest me?" or "will learning math make me a better problem solver?" DeLong and Winter (2002) also argue that on the contrary of intrinsically motivated students, lecturers would spend less preparation effort and they would have easier time to change the behavior of extrinsically motivated students (advantage). However, disadvantage of this theory is that lecturers often have difficulty of not knowing how to motivate students with extrinsic traits because this type of students are motivated with rewards or punishments and they lose interest when aforementioned incentives are absent. Lecturers also need to be careful using intrinsic and extrinsic motivation because research by Bain (2004) indicates that extrinsic rewards can have a negative impact on intrinsic motivation due to the fact that intrinsically motivated students would get demotivated by grades used as a motivation factor.

Besides theories, there are more basic approaches that lecturers can always utilize to motivate their students. Sometimes nonverbal component of communication by lecturers can deliver misleading messages to the students; therefore, it is crucial for the lecturers to have a positive attitude and passion about teaching. Building rapport with students can be a significant motivator in the sense that students will feel the lecturers' sincere effort to find out more about the students' background, interests, and future plans. Students can easily get demotivated when there is so much ambiguity and unknown about their course, especially if they have no clue about what to expect from the course and the lecturer in terms of grades. Having said that, lecturers, preferably in the first day of class, should explain clearly about the learning outcomes of the course and the expectations of the lecturer as well as the assessment criteria that will be used to calculate the grades. When students are included in the teaching/learning process, they become highly motivated to solve a problem or discover new ways of doing things on their own (esteem needs); moreover, this gives them the opportunity to work side by side with other classmates through collaboration (social and belonging needs). Although it is always easy to notice negative behavior and poor performance, however lecturers should always recognize positive behaviors and praise them accordingly, this will in turn foster and encourage other students follow the same path.

Various tools and techniques are always available to lecturers to utilize in motivating young students. The only problem is deciding what motivating techniques to use and when to use them. It is totally up to the lecturers either to teach with passion and leave everlasting positive impression on students who will see them as role models or to remain as ineffective lecturers who have failed to use a unique opportunity to shape up the lives of young ladies and gentlemen.

BIOGRAPHY

John Taskinsoy was born on October 20, 1967. He has been teaching at University Malaysia, Sarawak (Unimas) since 2011. After graduating from San Francisco State University in 1997 with a BSc degree in business administration, he was offered a management position at Nortel Networks where he had worked from 1997 to 2001. During 20 years of professional life, he has held many director positions in various companies. While he was employed, he also completed his first master's (MBA) in 1999 at University of Phoenix, and then he went on completing a second master's (MSc-telecommunication) at Golden Gate University in 2002.

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...being a good motivator
starts with
first being
a good communicator...

Motivating Learners and Lecturers

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Motivation is the key to keeping lecturers and students focused and to make each one of us feel worthy and happy in the teaching and learning environment. More often than not, our opinion matters the most when we make decisions. Motivation pushes us to accomplish our goals to improve our teaching and learning. However, keeping students interested and happy in learning is not an easy task.

Motivating Learners

Based on many popular motivation theories, students commonly direct their behaviors toward activities that they value and in which they have some expectancy of success (Mc Millan & Forsyth, 1991). Such activities will make them motivated to learn. Students learn by doing, making, writing, designing, creating, solving and other activities that require them to be active.

Based on my personal classroom experiences, from the moment I start teaching a course, it is good to get to know students by asking them to provide their profile or biodata, especially if they are in a large group. If the group is small, an ice breaking session is a good way to start the first lesson.

Facebook is also a medium to socialize with our students and to get to know them better. Using social networking sites like Facebook enables lecturers to share something about ourselves and what we stand for. In this way we will be able to let our students know that we have high expectations of them. We want them to succeed not only in class but also in their lives after university.

Making ourselves available for students is also an important motivating factor for students. Lecturers can let their students know that their lecturers can be reached by means of email, mobile phones, and Facebook, should the need arises.

Before we can get students to be interested in what they are learning, we should first be enthusiastic about the subject that we are about to teach. Lecturers' enthusiasm comes from confidence and interest for teaching and sharing knowledge with students. With self-assurance and motivation, lecturers are more prepared to deliver subject matter in an interesting manner and with greater zest.

There has been a handful of literature which revealed that most learning takes place outside the classroom. It is important, then, for a lecturer to lead students to continue learning after class; to prepare them for life-long learning, to require them to apply concepts or theory in their lives after class, and to shape their out of class learning experiences; through hints, suggestions, and assignments (Harris, 2010). Field trip is one of the ways to help students learn outside the classroom. They get to be exposed to real world examples and to socialize and work with the society.

In student centered learning, lecturers should focus on students' interests by looking at their needs and factors that motivate them to learn. For instance, when planning for a destination for a field trip, could a lecturer create options for

students, to choose between destination A or destination B? In creating the choices to choose from, the lecturer gets the students involved in the decision making process, and consequently encourage them to become more involved in the field trip activity.

Everyone likes to be rewarded, and reward is a way to get students motivated to learn. Rewards can be in the form of giving goodies, or providing students with positive feedback/ praise for doing well, participating in class or answering questions. Using rewards in a timely manner will in turn nurture students' belief that they can succeed over time and improve their performance in class. For lecturers, using rewards shows how much we care for our students.

Motivating Lecturers

One way to motivate lecturers is to have faculty retreats. During such retreats lecturers can be (re)motivated to work, as an expert in his/her discipline, and as part of a team. Such events are also timely for addressing any issues and ideas regarding our work and role at the university. Various retreat activities can be included such as a mixture of socialization and team-building activities; analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of work culture; and sports activity. Our university also encourages lecturers to seek for continuous professional development initiatives in the form of courses or workshops, conferences and postdoctoral studies. All lecturers are always encouraged to conduct research and apply for research grants either from internal or external sources.

Lecturers will be motivated if they can get their teaching materials ready before teaching. Good computer network in campus is needed for effective teaching delivery as everyone can get access online faster and will not have problem accessing the computer servers. Lecturers should also be encouraged to ask for the instructional supplies they require on time to facilitate teaching and learning as long as the request is within faculty's budgets.

In school, teachers are rewarded with Best Teacher awards. Likewise, there should also be awards for best lecturer at the faculty level, based on feedback from students and staff. The Centre for Applied Learning and Multimedia (CALM) has given out awards to lecturers who promote the e-learning culture. This award has motivated lecturers to enhance their teaching and learning. In addition, new lecturers are also given the opportunity to take up the Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning Programme as part of their continuing professional development.

For teaching and learning to be effective, a good lesson plan is important as it guides class instruction. Preparation of lesson plans is needed to keep lecturers on track and to stay motivated to teach.

Lecturers also can break away from their conventional methods to teach. For instance, they can use a variety

of teaching activities and methods in the course such as role playing, debates, brainstorming, discussions, demonstrations, case studies, audiovisual presentations, inviting guest speakers, small group work, or fieldwork which was mentioned earlier. Varying teaching methods and activities will keep lecturers motivated to teach and in achieving the teaching goals.

At the end of the class session, getting feedback either written or verbal from students is important in order to know what make them less or more motivated in learning. This involves lecturers' reflections on the instruction that have been carried out and what can be done further improve the teaching process.

Conclusions

Everyone wants to be successful in life. But to be successful, one thing we must have is motivation. For lecturers, motivation is important as it leads to job satisfaction. For students, motivation will make their learning experiences a delight instead of chore as they would have the desire to participate actively in the learning process and consequently gain the knowledge they are interested in. Gaining students' interest and motivation is necessary to achieve our teaching and learning goals. When students feel motivated, they will look forward to come to every class.

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Welcome to the Scary Accounting Class

- How to Motivate the Students to Love Learning Accounting

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Last week, I watched a cartoon about an accountant who was stressed while preparing an accounting report. The main character was not able to meet a deadline, because the numbers he tried to key in were messed up. Incidentally I also caught a movie which depicted an accounts clerk who gave up his accounting job to become an assassin, because his previous life was too dull. Both tales bore the same message – accounting is dull and stressful, and to a certain extent, can be quite daunting.

I can sense a similar sentiment when I teach Basic Accounting to students who are not from the Accounting programme at my faculty (Faculty of Economics & Business). It is a compulsory course for all programmes at the faculty. Many of these students hold the belief that Accounting is scary, and I find it a challenge to motivate them to learn and love the course throughout each semester.

There are a number of strategies I use in class to motivate my students, among which are described below:

1. **Prepare attractive slides for each class session.** In normal practice, lecture slides for Accounting are filled with numbers. Using interesting graphics like cartoons would capture students' attention, and consequently

would entice them to like the course over time. For example, when I taught a topic on *Provision for Doubtful Debt*, I showed the class a cartoon of a man on the top of a building who was about to commit suicide. While contemplating whether he should jump, the

character read a Nike advertisement which said "Just Do It". I related the same idea from the cartoon into my lecture, in that I explained how in a company which has doubts about a customer's ability to pay their debts, the Accounts Department would proceed to "Just Do It", which means they would create an account called "Provision for Doubtful Debt" for such cases.



2. **Give them real-life examples.** When I taught the *Introduction* chapter, many students found it hard to differentiate between "assets" and "liabilities". I used real life examples to exemplify the definitions. I elicited examples from the students' personal lives. In one instance, I asked them to think about their boyfriends/girlfriends, and to assess if the persons they love are an "asset" or a "liability". Using these terms, the

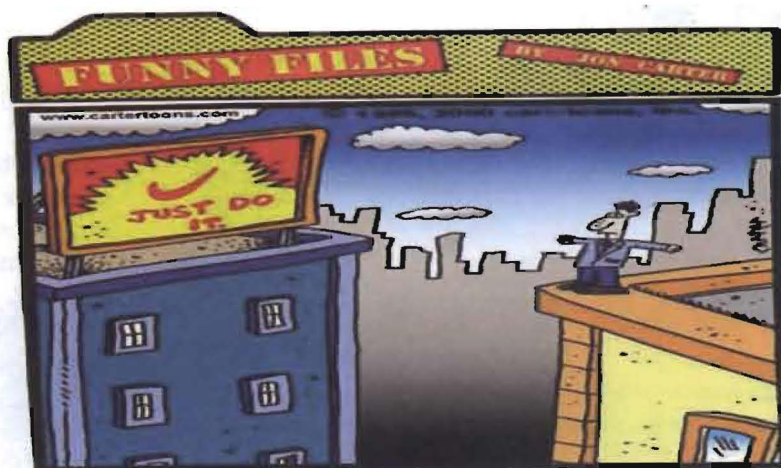
students were able to relate the concept about possessions that benefit and those that would cost them. In class, I would ask the students to provide examples why they assessed their partners as "assets" and "liabilities", and the activity generates interesting feedback from everyone.

3. **Schedule for short lectures and longer tutorial sessions.** To learn Accounting, one needs a lot of practical exercises and tutorials. Each semester, I am scheduled three hours per week to teach the course. I would then divide the hours accordingly, in that the lecture sessions would take up the minimal amount of time, and the rest of the hours every week is spent on tutorial sessions. The tutorial sessions allow me to personally observe the students' work, and I get more time to discuss their problems while checking on their work.

I am able to assess their strengths and weaknesses in these tutorial sessions.

I always find students more forthcoming when I allow time for discussions in class.

It is interesting to find out about the students' personal assessments about why they find Accounting frightening – their reasons range from weakness in calculations, problems in English skills, and some even confessed to have parents who work in the Audit field which made them dislike the field altogether. The tutorial sessions allow me time to assess students' level of comprehension, and the input help me prepare for the upcoming sessions. I find many students ignore basic formats to prepare solutions, and some make careless mistakes when calculating the solutions to exercises assigned to them.



4. **Trigger their interest with the word “EXAM”.** In the middle of the lecture, especially for topics which are theoretical

or technical, I would use the word “exam” to refocus their attention. When I suggest that the topic I was teaching would appear in the upcoming exams, students would pay more serious attention to the content of the lecture. When the word “exam” is used, many would

start asking questions, reading carefully and listening attentively in class.

Not all students are unmotivated to learn Accounting. When I asked those who did well in the course, they would reason that they like Accounting, and they do their best to learn as much as they can in the course. Undoubtedly students who are motivated to do well in this course are those who love the nature of the discipline, and they are intrinsically motivated to excel. I hold the belief that if I can consistently drive the students to become interested in Accounting, the students will eventually like and enjoy the course, and consequently they will see that Accounting is not a scary course after all.

A Little Care Goes a Long Way: Teaching Beyond the Superficial Norm

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Motivated students have also been observed as displaying positive attitudes to learning which further contribute to success factors (Kinnunen, McCartney, Murphy, & Thomas, 2007; McCartney, Eckerdal, Moström, Sanders, & Zander, 2007).

The term Motivation is often mentioned in the teaching learning literature. Many terms such as intrinsic and extrinsic as well as integrative and instrumental are often linked with motivation and a number of theories have been formed concerning it. These theories offer to explain motivation from diverse perspectives such as incentive, drive, needs, and cognition. Despite such divergence, there is a mutual focus of what motivation stands for. With its roots from the Latin verb *motivus*, which means 'to move', motivation indicates a force which makes one to do something. As a process, motivation entails mental or physical activity, moving towards a goal, and involves being activated and sustained (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Williams & Burden, 1997).

Motivation plays an important role in the field of education. Many research studies have highlighted the importance of motivation for students. Motivated students have been reported to excel in their learning. They have the drive to succeed as they believe in their own ability and thus, are more likely to persevere to successfully complete a task (Perry, Stupnisky, Daniels, & Hayes, 2008; Weiner, 2008).

Motivation is also significant for educators. In the context of tertiary education, motivation has been described as the ingredient that stimulates lecturers to excel in their career (McInnis, 2000). Lecturers who are motivated to do well in their teaching careers have been reported to be optimistic and enthusiastic resulting in higher commitment towards their work (Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008).

Although the motivation factors of lecturers and students seem separate due to their respective conditions, they are in essence related. Dörnyei (2001) observes that teachers play an important role in motivating students by creating teaching learning conditions that encourage students to progress in their learning. Such conditions involve maintaining a pleasant and supportive atmosphere and adopting appropriate behaviour (Dörnyei, 2001).

One element under motivational influence on learning is self esteem. In relation to this, it is extremely important not to destroy students' self esteem especially adolescent students like those attending our classes. A simple way in creating a positive learning environment is through praises. When students respond to a question raised or participate in a discussion – be it online or face to face sessions, it is important to encourage their contribution. Simple praises like 'excellent answer', 'well done' for perfect responses, and 'good attempt, good try', for responses which are not quite accurate, have significant positive effect on students. Such practice also encourages students to participate in the teaching learning process and become more active learners. In addition, it also helps overcome a serious problem in our teaching learning context – *passive student dilemma*.



Motivating students in the context of higher learning is particularly important as evident in the research literature which have highlighted the need to provide them with emotional support given the higher levels of life styles and academic stress (Abdulghani, 2008; Bíró, Balajti, Adány, & Kósa, 2009; Laws & Fielder, 2012). Students who feel emotionally supported are reported to perform better than those who are not (Aschenbrand, Angelosante, & Kendall, 2005). The realities at universities where we are faced with large number of students are blamed to affect lecturer-student relationship which was once of 'apprentice-master' to now, a 'consumer-provider' (Jenkins, 2010). Moreover, often the importance of research and publication is made clearly known especially through the 'publish or perish' ideology, but 'effective teaching or perish' is almost never heard. One essential aspect of motivation which is often neglected or ignored is the need to show compassion and be caring towards students i.e. provision of pastoral care.



While there are various definitions on what constitutes pastoral care, there has been a lack of a careful distinction of what it entails. The literature in the field suggests pastoral care as involving the guidance teachers provide as they take personal interest in their students as individuals to assist them in making particular choices or decisions

(Best, Jarvis, & Ribbins, 1977; Best, 1999a, 1999b). Best et al. (1977) explained that pastoral care involves two main terms which are 'guidance' and 'counselling' and in the context of teaching and learning refers to the non-

instructional features of the role of teachers in an educational institution. However, the authors caution for the need to be clear that the guidance and counselling teachers provide are distinctly different from the personalised services of counsellors who have expertise and training to advise

students. Support provided by teachers through pastoral care are the ones within the context of teaching and learning (Best et al., 1977). A definition provided by the UK Department of Education and Science (1988) perhaps best describes pastoral care as follows,

Pastoral care is concerned with promoting pupils'

personal and social development and fostering positive attitudes: through the quality of teaching and learning; through the nature of relationships amongst pupils, teachers, and adults other than teachers; through arrangements for monitoring pupils' overall progress, academic, personal and social; through specific pastoral and support systems; and through extra-curricular activities and the school ethos. In such context it offers support for the learning,

behaviour and welfare of all pupils, and addresses the particular difficulties some individual pupils may be experiencing. (p. 3)

At the university where we deal with large numbers of students in each class, the tendency to ignore 'problematic' students is often inevitable. However, a little care and effort from the part of the lecturer can help make a significant positive difference in a student's life. Allow us to share two experiences:

Case 1

A student who has been coming diligently for class did not turn up for two consecutive weeks and he also missed the scheduled oral assessment. His contact number was obtained from the faculty and he was successfully contacted after several futile attempts. During the face-to-face meeting, he explained that his father was recently hospitalized and eventually died. He was advised to submit the relevant documents and he was allowed to take the assessment. He continued to come for class and did well in the course.

Had the student in Case 1 not been contacted and asked for reasons for his absence, he might have been barred from sitting for the examination due to poor attendance and may have to repeat the course. A small effort to reach out and care by the lecturer has made a difference in the student's university life.

Case 2

There was once a mature student who was diligent and was above average in terms of academic performance. However, as the weeks went by she was observed to often come late for lectures and at times would not turn up at all. She was reported to have been regularly spotted selling cakes at a construction site during the day and at a market during the night. When she was asked about her frequent absence, she broke down and explained that as she was recently divorced, life was difficult for her and the three young children under her care. Her scholarship was insufficient to meet her family's needs and she was contemplating quitting her degree programme at the end of the semester.

What the student in Case 2 did not realise was that there is help available at the university. She was put in touch with the relevant authorities on campus through which not only financial assistance, but also emotional support by a professional counsellor was provided. Had it not been for such intervention, this student would not have completed her course and finally graduate.

We should not go in and out of class in a mechanical manner. In addition to being knowledgeable in the subject matter, preparing interesting teaching learning materials, we could also help make a great difference in students' lives by providing pastoral care when needed. Pastoral care needs to be incorporated and considered as an important element of good teaching practices. Such considerations require institutions of higher learning to devise a code for pastoral care to enhance the delivery of academic programmes. Emphasising a need for pastoral care in our theatres of learning is imperative in our efforts to develop well balanced individuals. Personal care in scaffolding of students' learning, and providing pastoral support is crucial to facilitate students' journey while at the university.

This article acknowledges the importance of research and publication as crucial aspects of academe but at the same time highlights the need to give equal, if not more, emphasis to effective teaching and learning. Teaching beyond the superficial norm is certainly not an easy task. Moreover, it is not easily acknowledged as part of workload and appraised as it is with publications in ISI journals, which are applauded and carry notable merits among academicians today. Seeing a student who could have become a university dropout due to circumstances, completing his or her study and doing well in life, is an immeasurable reward.

It is hoped that the experiences shared in this article can provide some awareness on the importance of pastoral care as a worthwhile effort to motivate learners to learn at their level best, and for us to achieve the core of effective teaching.

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MOTIVATION TO MOVE FORWARD ON MORPHEUS

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UNIMAS has been using blended e-Learning to complement classroom teaching since late 1990s. Many lecturers on campus, the young and the seniors, have taken up the initiative to create online spaces for their courses each semester using Morpheus, the official e-Learning platform for the university. For Semester 1 2012/2013, 404 lecturers (out of 625) are actively using 516 course spaces on Morpheus. This represents approximately 65% of lecturers who are currently teaching courses on campus.

After more than a decade of using e-Learning, motivation to move forward with new online teaching strategies may be fading. Many may have fallen into the “comfort zone” trap. Although they continue to have the same online courses on Morpheus each academic session, it seems that very little or no changes are made to the course spaces, making them look like exact replicas of the online version which they had first created on Morpheus. According to Mahzideh, Biemans and Mulder (2008), willingness from the part of the teacher/course instructor to use e-Learning possibilities in the long run is crucial because they are the initiators and facilitators to students’ use of e-Learning. If we, as lecturers, are not motivated to create captivating online activities for learning, the direct impact will be felt by our students, our primary stakeholder group at the university.

Creating online spaces to support learning requires many hours of thinking, reading and mindful effort to uptake the design, development and implementation tasks needed. Online spaces which are successful in supporting learning are often those that take up many days of planning and developing; the results are best seen through student performances in assessments and end-of-semester feedback. It is a well-established fact that academics are busy people; therefore, to create online spaces and make changes to existing ones will take up time and demand commitment. The fact that recognition for the initiatives to develop such spaces is not measured like those of publications in ISI journals and so forth further relegates the need to include or consider online space as a viable support for learning.

According to Diana Laurillard, a renowned Educational Technology professor at the Institute of Education, London, it is necessary for an online course to have...

...contextual experimentation, and to continually adjust its functionality to the needs of the users. Teachers are not keen to have to work out how to use the digital tools offered to them. Neither do they need any additional administrative burden requiring “self-discipline”. Using them has to be simple and transparent. (Laurillard, 2007, p2)

If we examine the existing online learning tools in Morpheus, which are mostly simple to use and easy to manage, why aren’t we making progressive effort to make our online courses more engaging and challenging?

Categories and Criteria for Successful e-Learning

The types of Blended e-Learning that UNIMAS lecturers use can be categorized based on Jara and Mohamad's Pedagogical Templates for e-Learning (2007), specifically the first three types of seven templates described, which are:

1) Online Administrative Support

Core learning activities and support are done face-to-face. Administrative information (announcements, calendar etc.), readings, materials, submission of assignments, and some support are provided online.

2) Follow-up

Core learning activities and support are done face-to-face. Additional online tasks and support are organized in between sessions as follow up or preparation for the class sessions (e.g. to keep communication and focus in between sessions).

3) Parallel

Learning activities run in parallel, some in the face-to-face sessions, others online.

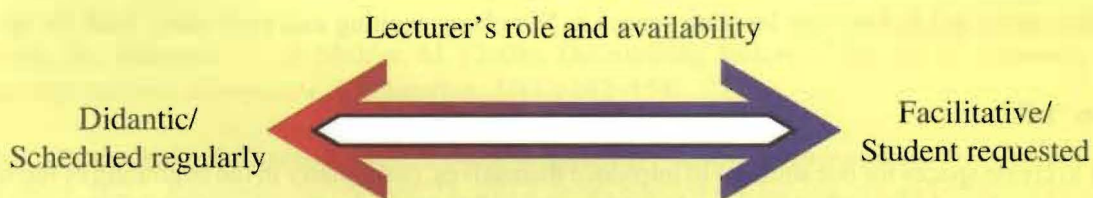
In UNIMAS, e-Learning primarily supports classroom sessions, and a majority of lecturers use the online spaces in Morpheus to provide Online Administrative Support for students (the first level of Blended e-Learning in Jara & Mohamad's model).

Now that we have established where most of us stand, the next question is, how do we motivate ourselves as lecturers to continuously make our online courses interesting and engaging?

An insightful study by Siragusa et al. (2007) presented six factors that relate directly to lecturers' role in making e-Learning work for their courses. Some of the factors include:

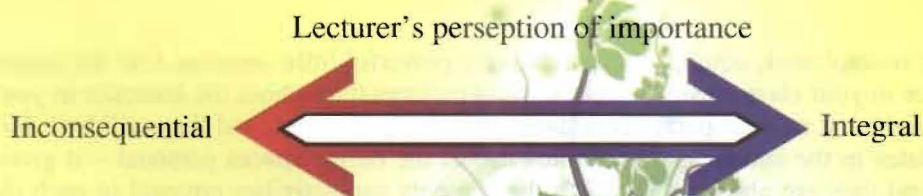
1) Lecturers' role and availability

Lecturers need to assume various degrees of commitment, specifically to facilitate students' learning processes, and one of the key elements is to make themselves available to students. For instance, those teaching first year students may have to regularly be available online and face-to-face, specifically to mediate learning activities and tasks. Regular postings online may help alleviate a first year student's anxiety in dealing with the contents they learn for the first time at university level.



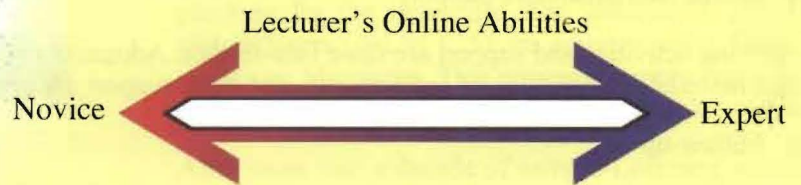
2) Lecturers' perception of importance

When lecturers perceive the online learning initiative is important, they will use and integrate it into their teaching practices. When students sense and become cognizant of the importance of the online space created by the lecturers, they will consequently put in conscious effort to use online learning in their learning process.



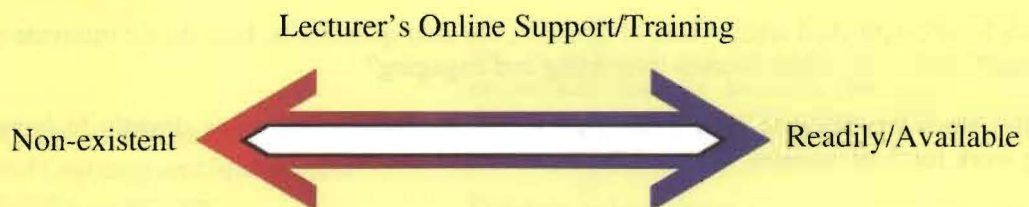
3) Lecturers' online abilities

A lecturer has to have skills to use online tools effectively. A skilful lecturer will use and integrate as many features within an online space, to match the learning needs of students enrolled in the course.



4) Lecturers' online support and training

Those who are keen to develop content knowledge of the courses they teach would be inclined to integrate the newest, latest ideas in the field into the online learning environments they manage and teach. Those who are less keen would not be bothered to update their slides, resources they upload, and may use the same materials over and over again. The university has to play its part to recognise the extensive amount of work that a lecturer takes in designing, developing and improving instruction in their online course spaces. To be able to progressively improve e-Learning skills, training is key, and it has to be continuously done.



These factors reflect the strengths of a lecturer's position in making learning using online tools effective for university students. We are dealing with young adults with varying learning needs and styles, and many require different levels of support and facilitation in their pursuit for university education, which is vastly different from their primary and secondary education.

Motions to Motivate Us and Our Students

These are some ideas to try out to keep our learning spaces in Morpheus exciting and motivating, both for us and the students:

1) Make them "talk".

Use the forum tool to create spaces for our students to introduce themselves, particularly in the beginning of the semester. The introductory messages can help set the tempo and mood for the online space. Lecturers can use information acquired from the students in the design of relevant learning activities throughout the semester. Relationships and rapport between lecturers and students can be developed over informal discussion spaces within the course sites, and students would consequently use the online spaces more significantly as they connect with the rest of the classmates and lecturers. At the close of the semester, get them to reflect on what they have learned. You can create short task such as drawing an infographic of all key concepts they have learned in your class. Get them to share their work with others by uploading their documents online. Create a friendly conversation with them, either in the final class session, or on Morpheus, to summarise and conclude ideas taught in the courses.

2) Use your cameras.

Most of us are already using smartphones, equipped with relatively powerful little cameras. Use the camera, and take pictures of events taking place in your class sessions. Upload class pictures throughout the semester in your Morpheus class sites – it can trigger delight and most importantly, anticipation, from the class, and they will look forward to see your future uploads and updates in the course spaces. Photos makes the online spaces personal – it gives a sense of belonging for the students, and they are able to relate with the contents and activities covered in each class session, online and face-to-face, as they view themselves as belonging to the "class".

- 3) “A picture is worth a thousand words”. Use graphics where relevant.

In this era of media dominance, we cannot deny the power of visual stimuli. Beautify your online course spaces. Use relevant graphics – choose those which can trigger curiosity, and challenge the students to think beyond what is presented in class.

- 4) Use “One minute notes”, and accumulate them in the discussion forum online.

These one-minute notes can help students brainstorm and connect ideas that they have learned from our classes, and these notes can be uploaded into the discussion forum spaces within our course sites in Morpheus. The contributions from the students, though seemingly small and simple, will get the students excited about seeing their own work being uploaded for everyone to access in the course sites.

- 5) Excitement begets excitement.

Create opportunities for lecturers in each faculty to talk about what they did and what they have learned from what they have done. Sharing sessions are crucial, as these conversations which happen at the collegial level can trigger excitement and sustain interest throughout the faculty. A lively and informative series of “experience sharing” sessions will benefit everyone who is interested to make learning, and teaching, a meaningful occupation.

Conclusion

In sum, using e-Learning for many years may have created many Blended Learning experts among lecturers on campus; however, if our collective knowledge, skills and experiences in using e-Learning are not enhanced and enriched over time, the learning experience for our students may become mundane and predictable.

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Simple Ways to Motivate and Engage Your Students to Use Morpheus@UNIMAS

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Throughout the last two decades, with the surge of use of multimedia and e-learning in university classrooms across the globe, great emphasis has been placed on the issue of student motivation. Unfortunately it has been observed in many research that not all students are consistently nor highly motivated to learn and use online learning tools. How could university lecturers and instructors motivate, engage and encourage their students to learn online?

Motivational factors

Student motivation is an essential component for success in a learning environment, especially in a university setting. Motivational factors differentiate between those who seriously want to learn and those who fail to learn. This is particularly true for online and unsupervised learning.

Motivation is important in any teaching and learning process because it improves students' work quality (Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Glazewski, Newby, & Ertmer, 2010), especially in science-based subjects (Dermitzaki, Stavroussi, Vavougios, & Kotsis, 2012). Motivation also facilitates students towards achieving success of their learning (Law, Lee, & Yu, 2010).

Students' motivation also could be linked with learning experience (Bertacchini, Bilotta, Pantano, & Tavernise, 2012). Normally students with positive experiences and attitude tend to perform better in the classroom.

Motivation is one of the main factors that influence the student performance in lecture halls. Based on a study among 1,360 students, Velayutham, Aldridge, and Fraser (2012) found that learning objectives orientation, value of task and self-belief are important aspects of student motivation.

Meanwhile, Kim (2012) studied the reciprocal impact of emotions and motivation which can lead to success or to course dropout (Figure 1). He argued that we should optimize both emotion and motivation factors to support student performance.

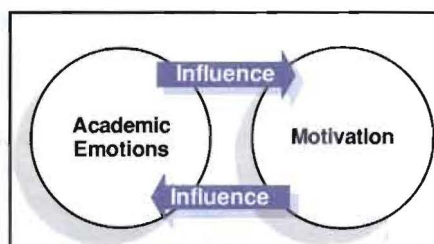


Figure 1: Reciprocal impact of emotions and motivation.

As a result, course designers, lecturers and instructors are challenged to ensure that their educational contents are always relevant (McGill, 2012). In consequence, they have to refresh and realign their teaching materials with the current trends. They have to equip themselves with radar to detect the ever-changing job market demand. Finally, students will see the direct connection between their course assignments and projects once they graduate.

If students are able to see the significance of being successful in their learning process, they may voluntarily focus and eventually become deeply engaged with their learning. Students would submit their assignments on time and according to the requirements of the tasks.

Motivation pre-requisite

In a study by Kubiato and Haláková (2009), it was summed that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) could increase student motivation. In a similar vein, providing well-established Internet connection has become a pre-requisite for learning support for students. It could motivate students, as asserted by López, Luis, Labord, Royo, and Teresa (2011) who mentioned: “Students have access to course material, as well as an online digital library where they can carry out tasks and do exams, thus motivating learning.”

Consequently, there should not any tolerance fortolerate poor computer network service on campus. Internet access must be available 24/7 for students, and it should be reliable. The connection should be established automatically (with security features) in all students’ lounges, cafeterias and even from their residential colleges. Slow connection (which tend to occur during the early semester) may lead to student frustration. Failure to connect is a discouragement factor for students to engage online.

Interacting and motivating

Ideally, online learning activity should overcome the weakness of face-to-face or traditional classroom learning (Saba, 2012). On a similar position, Cho (2012) raised a concern on the need to educate students to develop strong understanding of the nature of online learning. They have to understand why they need to engage in online learning session, similar to having an understanding of the importance of face-to-face sessions with their course lecturers.

For example, in the absence of their course lecturers, the students have to manage their own learning activity. From the students’ perspectives, they must realize that effective learning requires active participation. They also have to collaborate among their colleagues to achieve learning outcomes. They should not hesitate to express their ideas and share their knowledge.

On the other hand, from the teaching perspective, lecturers need to discover and use new techniques to support lively online presence (Keengwe, Adjei-Boateng, & Diteeyont, 2012). For example, they can use simple chat (Figure 2) and forum tools (Figure 3 and 4).



Figure 2: A screen shot for a chat session for a course that I conducted in Semester 1, 2011-2012 (TMT4053: Multimodal Interaction Technology). Number in the bracket indicated the frequency of responses. The session lasted for almost one hour.

TMT4053: Multimodal Interaction Technology_sem1_1112

Jump to

MORPHEUS ► TMT4053_sem1_1112 ► Forums ► W3 Discussions

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Q1: The multimedia sources of information now available has increased the need for truly multimodal search. Discuss.

Q2: Depends on our performance and limitation as human being, predict difficulties that will arise if multimodal interaction is to be implemented totally.

Q3: Choose one and explain applications of multimodal information retrieval in:

- Bioinformatics
- Autonomic computing
- Medical imaging in healthcare
- News video.
- Surveillance
- Multimodal decision support.
- Digital libraries
- Internet search

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Discussion	Started by	Replies	Last post
Q3	 Syahrul Nizam Junaini	6	RAYMOND CHEN SONG NGU Tue, 4 Oct 2011, 04:20 PM
Q2	 Syahrul Nizam Junaini	9	RAYMOND CHEN SONG NGU Tue, 4 Oct 2011, 04:01 PM
Q1	 Syahrul Nizam Junaini	7	NUR FARHANA DAWAMA BT MAZLAN Sun, 2 Oct 2011, 10:32 AM

Figure 3: Forum discussion for TMT4053: Multimodal Interaction Technology.

 **Re: Q2**
 by CHOON SEE NG - Monday, 26 September 2011, 09:04 AM

Answer Q2=>
 If multimodal interaction is implemented totally in this world, there might arise certain difficulties. For example, some disabled people that are are not able to talk and has limitation on hand movement, it is very difficult if need them to draw and talk their need on the search engine. They might prefer to only using text to search, which is only use keyboard and type their need on the search field. Besides, some people are hard to express what they need to search. It is difficult for them to let the retrieval system return result which is able to fulfil their requirements.

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 **Re: Q2**
 by SYAZWANI BINTI HUSSEN - Sunday, 2 October 2011, 09:25 AM

i agree with your answer choon see. If multimodal interaction is implemented totally in this world, there are difficult for disability people especially blind people to interact with the new technology. may be it is okay if we still keep the manual interaction. make it balance. it is easier for disability people to interact with.

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Figure 4: Using the forum tool, the students were encouraged to reply to their friends' comments.

In online facilitation, students expect their course lecturers to establish meaningful and motivating interactions. In an online learning environment, a lecturer has to give honest, friendly and timely feedback to the students. As a result, students would become more engaged in online discussions. Only when the lecturer is able to establish meaningful online interactions and more importantly to sustain the virtual communication channel, then the learning process will occur (Amanatidis, 2012).

In my personal experience as a course instructor using online learning, I continuously encourage my students during the face-to-face sessions to be involved actively online. I make my expectations clear--they have to be highly active in the online class sessions. I also remind them to visit Morpheus@UNIMAS regularly. This is because I upload almost all course documents (such as lecture notes, assignments and project instructions) online. The students do not expect hard copy versions of lecture notes or any learning materials used in the course. However, I have to be cautious since Kinlaw, Dunlap and D'Angelo (2012) hypothesized that the more course materials are provided online, the more possibility are for the student not to attend the lecture sessions.

Besides that, in order to manage the learning activity, I should give my students maximum autonomy with minimum monitoring. A study among 320 students from elementary schools in Netherlands revealed one important point. An online learning infrastructure that is combined with autonomy support has positive effect on the intrinsic inclination and learning outcomes (Loon, Ros, & Martens, 2012).

Several other simple ways to motivate and engage your students to use morpheus@UNIMAS are as follows:

- Embed exciting videos from YouTube and interesting presentations from SlideShare (Figure 5).
- Offer some rewards (which will become “carrots”) for active students. I reward my students using ‘stars.’ The more they contribute positively in the discussion, the more ‘stars’ they collect.
- Insert or link various interactive multimedia source such as real-time web-base data, interactive maps and flash games.
- Connect the learning content with current trends and development such as using Google News.

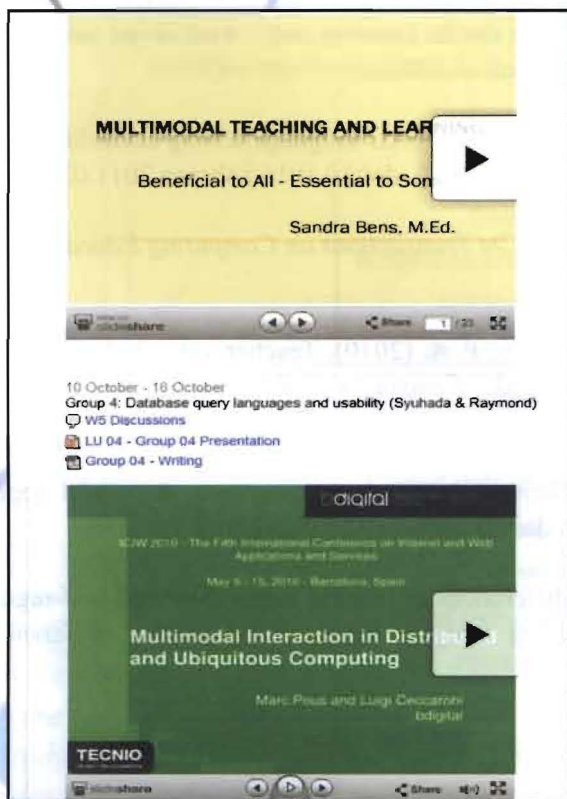


Figure 5. Embedded presentations from SlideShare.

In summary, the nature of Morpheus@UNIMAS is that it is just a Learning Management Systems (LMS) that administrates online learning activities. It is not a full-fledged E-Learning platform that supports the holistic process of learning. However as lecturers, we are still able to motivate our students with the above-mentioned strategies. It is to ensure that our students maximise the virtual learning environment through userfriendly and meaningful feedback.

Acknowledgment

I wish to thank Natasha Abd Latip for giving suggestion to improve the interaction process between lecturers and students on Morpheus@UNIMAS.

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Motivating Students: The Alma Mater in Their Dreams

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What kind of university would make students feel good to be part of and to call their alma mater? This was the question that prompted a recent survey of student views on the characteristics of an outstanding university. 132 students from Years 1 to 4 in various degree programmes in UNIMAS were asked to write down the characteristics of an outstanding university. No other prompts were provided to ensure there are no biasness in their views. Students could write any number of characteristics. Hence, the total number of characteristics obtained in the survey is not equivalent to the sample size of the study. Figure 1 shows the results of the survey.

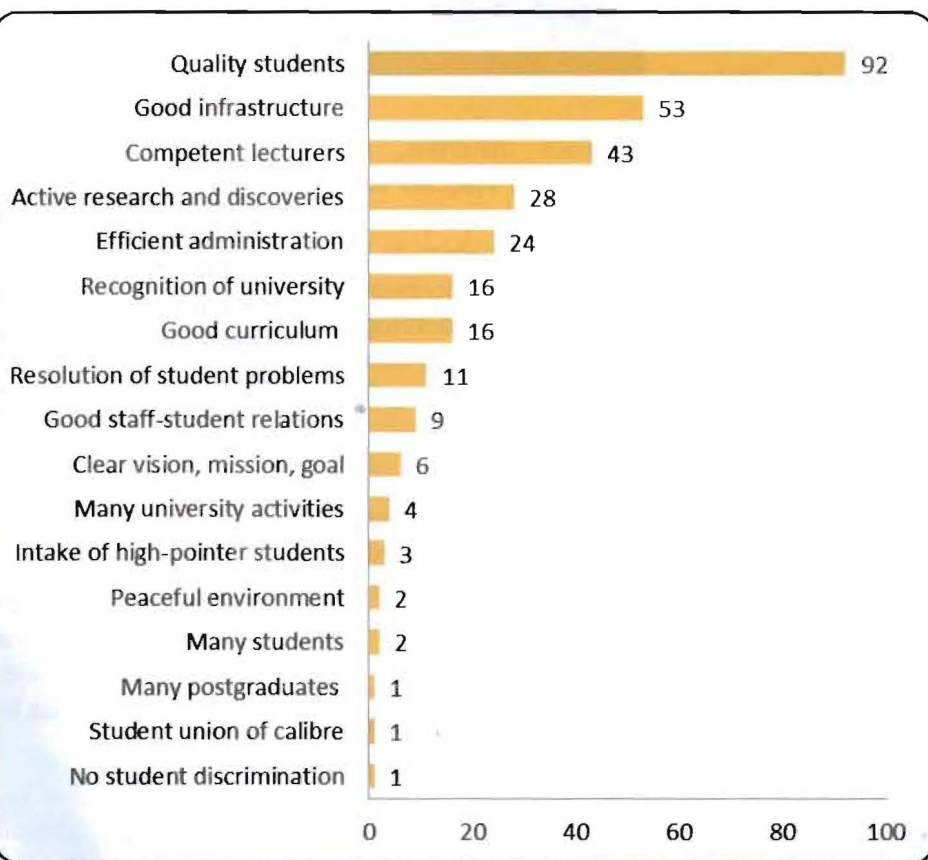


Figure 1. Findings of a study on UNIMAS students' perceptions of characteristics of an outstanding University

The university students felt that an outstanding university is one that produces outstanding students. This is a characteristic that is mentioned most frequently in the survey (70% or 92 of 132 students). Different adjectives were used by students but they all pointed to excellent quality of graduates produced: some of the descriptions used were “multi-talented”, “good results”, “disciplined”, “ethical”, “systematic”, “can compete in the job market” and “excellent”. These descriptors allude to what the participants of the study wish to be upon graduation. In this light, it is understandable why certain universities highlight the achievements of the alumni to build confidence in the undergraduates. However, most of the time the achievements of alumni are placed in alumni magazines and events involving the alumni (e.g., *The Leader*; Universiti Sains Malaysia) but it may be worth noting that such information can be used to construct students’ perceptions of the ability of their university to produce good quality graduates who stand out in the society. The construction of the university quality needs to start with the students while they are still studying at the university.

Good infrastructure is the second most important characteristic of an outstanding university, according to 53 students (or 40% of total number of participants). The infrastructure highlighted by students included sophisticated

sports complex, safety, reference materials, hostel accommodation, and laboratories. Five students singled out high level technology for educational purpose as an important feature of an outstanding university to them. Undoubtedly, good infrastructure support is necessary for learning to take place and for the wholesome development of the students. In fact, facilities have a strong influence on students’ choice of institution of higher learning (Price, Matzdorg, Smith, & Agahi, 2003).

On the third most popular criterion, the students did not forget the role of lecturers in their university education. The students were very aware that university lecturers educate them differently from school teachers. They liked the close guidance provided by teachers but they also acknowledged that lecturers promote independent learning, an essential element to build students’ critical thinking and problem solving ability. These skills help to prepare students for their future role in the workplace. About one-third of the students in the present study highlighted the importance of having qualified lecturers who have the right qualifications, enough knowledge and experience and commitment to students’ learning. Several mentioned “a large number of

professors” as an indicator of an outstanding university. To these students, qualified lecturers are key for them to get good results in their courses and to be prepared for their profession – similar to what Voss, Gruber and Szmigin (2007) found in their survey of students’ expectations of service quality at a European university.

In the survey, 28 out of 132 students cited research recognition as an important characteristic of an outstanding university. They stated that an outstanding university is one where lecturers carry out many researches, obtain national and international recognitions for their research work, and produce new knowledge and discoveries. The findings revealed that students were aware that a university is not just a place for them to learn at a more advanced level, but it is also a place where knowledge is cultivated and shared with the rest of the world. With the current national interest in university rankings and classification of universities into research and non-research universities, the awareness of the importance of research is in the public realm, students included. The study has also illustrated that these students are inclined to link the amount of research to undergraduate reputation, much like in the expectations in American universities (Grunig, 1997), where universities are often projected to contribute to the advancement of knowledge through research.

The study has also shown that some students wanted to study in a university which has national and international recognition (16 out of 132 students). Although the percentage of responses for this aspect is minimal, the participants of the study had have some idea of what contributes to the standing of a university.

For example, the students listed compliance with Ministry of Higher Education standards, quality image and ability to compete with other universities. A major part of the recognition comes from the research profile of the university, a phenomenon highlighted by 28 students in the survey. Although what concerns the students directly is a sound curriculum and sound teaching (as mentioned by 16 students), to have a good university education, they want to belong to a university they can be proud of.

Efficient university administration surprisingly emerged as the fifth most frequently mentioned characteristic of an outstanding university. In the eyes of the participants, a good university is one with a commendable management. To them, it meant having changes in university policies to be disseminated efficiently to all students; to make it work, the management has to be fast, systematic, organised and friendly.

On a similar sentiment, eleven participants indicated the need for promptness to resolve student problems, a characteristic they identified important for an outstanding university. A remark from one of the students stated how



it is insufficient to only listen to student problems, but also to take action on the problems. In order to understand the importance of this aspect, it is necessary to take a step back and consider the parts of the administrative system that students are likely to encounter and may have problems with. These may include hostel matters, course registration, class and examination scheduling and financial matters dealing with their scholarships and loans. In these matters, students deal with academic and non-academic staff and to them and, for them, it is important to have interactions which are cordial (*mesra* is the word often used by the nine students who highlighted this point). If the system were without glitches, this factor would have been a non-issue and might have escaped the attention of students. Interestingly, this factor did not surface in Joseph and Joseph's (1997) survey of final year students' expectations of New Zealand universities which involved seven main factors (programme, academic reputation, physical aspects/cost, career opportunities, location, time and others which includes family and peer influence).

In sum, the main characteristics of an outstanding university are quality graduates, good infrastructure, competent lecturers, research profile, efficient administration, good curriculum and national and international recognition. The other features account for less than 15% of the characteristics brought up by students in the survey. It is clear from the responses analysed from the participants of the study, quality products of university education, both the human and non-human factors have to be in place. The infrastructure, administrative system and curriculum need to be taken care of. At the same time, the lecturers are also seen to be instrumental in providing quality university education. Quality begets quality. These human and non-human factors beget the aura of quality that surrounds an outstanding university – one that students would be proud to call their university and their alma mater.

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Making Going into the Woods a Worthwhile Journey

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A renowned American writer, Henry David Thoreau, in his book entitled 'Walden; or, Life in the Woods' wrote the following:



"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived"

The act of teaching in the world of academia is like *going into the woods*. There is a lot of uncertainty that awaits – some can be pleasant and some displeasing. Getting due recognition for the contributions made, either in kinds or monetary; feeling great satisfaction for creating new knowledge that benefit people in the surrounding, either learners, peers or superiors; and receiving simple expression of gratitude from those who appreciate the extra mile that has been travelled to make their life journey meaningful and memorable, are some of the pleasant experiences

that venturing into the woods can offer. However, the woods may not have a clear route to pass through, thus making the journey frustrating, somewhat senseless, or perhaps summed as a waste of time. The woods can also be a very confusing place to be in, especially when each corner of the woods looks very similar to each other, but each nook and cranny demand different types of care and attention. Further escalating the confusion is the pointless trips that have to be made, back and forth, sometimes in a roundabout manner, in order to meet the requirements enforced by others who may or may not have sufficient experience about *going into the woods*. With no clear signposts, the lived experience may take a toll on those who have chosen *going into the woods* as part of their life adventure.



The woods are often seen as the ground preparation for life beyond. Those who have opted to go into the woods, by right, must care for all the young plants inside, making sure they are well nurtured and cared for. Important conditions for growth such as light, temperature, supply of water and fertilizing must be considered so that young plants are able to cultivate and withstand any challenge that come their way. When the time comes for them to make the transition to life beyond the woods, irrespective of where the environs may be, the plants will be ready. Striking the right balance to nurture the young plants in challenging conditions is not an easy task. Young plants tend to wilt, turn yellow, and become susceptible to diseases if the conditions made available for them do not facilitate their growth. To care for these young plants can also be exhausting and stressful. Some plants may require delicate and gentle care, demanding more attention than others. Some may not need constant supervision as their foundations are already solid, however, they may still require guidance, encouragement, monitoring and counselling, to ensure that they grow to become great trees in their own right.

Due to the diversity of the young plants in the woods, which are in need of regular care and supervision, and a variety of responsibilities and miscellaneous tasks that lie ahead along the path in the woods, either related directly to meeting the needs of the young plants or other living beings in the surrounding environment, *going into the woods* may be synonymous to going into a battlefield. The beauty of nature, the breath of fresh air, the enchanting flora and fauna, the luscious green landscape in the woods, in its entirety, can easily become hidden from view when the focus of *going into the woods* has shifted from caring and nurturing others, to struggling to survive and endure trials and tribulations in order to live in harmony in the environment. Once the focus becomes clouded, the journey into the woods, into the wonders of academia, would lose its appeal and it would no longer be deemed worthwhile.

The motive that triggers the decision to make the journey into the woods, or rather choose a career in academia, plays a big role in shaping the kind of teaching experience that academics would have. There may be various pathways that have to be travelled before reaching the woods; however to step inside the woods, and make adaptations to the life in the woods, to learn from each experience to become a nurturer in the woods, is a decision that needs to be consciously made. When being in the woods feels suffocating or overwhelming, perhaps it's best to reflect on the motive that led to the decision to step inside the woods in the first place. If it is worth staying on or if the motive is still relevant and meaningful, necessary measures need to be taken to alleviate the feeling.



There is an abundance of reading materials, tried and tested techniques and strategies on how to become or continue to be motivated in teaching, which can be used as travelling guides when walking in the woods. However, they most likely would not make any difference if personal satisfaction is no longer experienced when being in the woods. The inner core must be **willing** to be reignited in order to shine onto others. The brighter the inner core gets, the better the performance or output would be, especially for those who are under its care. The inner core must be **keen to new learning experiences** that the woods have to offer. The more learning opportunities it acquires the more enriched the experience of *going into the woods* would be. The inner core must be **ready to rise to challenges** that come along with the journey into the woods, regardless of any downhill steps, or missteps, as the key objective is to climb up to a greater height. The inner core must also be **eager and committed** to make *going into the woods* an extraordinary journey, one that leaves a profound and lasting impact on the lives of others whose paths it crosses along the way.

Going into the woods is indeed a personal journey. Though there are millions of others who have trodden the path, no two experiences are ever the same. However, from the journey of others, one common thread seems to be that *going into the woods*, in the world of academia, can be **a rewarding experience** if one chooses to live deliberately in the woods - to make the best out of what it has to offer and not look at the living experience as one filled with regret but overflowing with opportunities for advancement, both intellectually and emotionally. Hence, with the time that is left, why not '**Seize the Day**' and decide to go *into the woods*, into the robust complex world of academia, an extraordinary and worthwhile experience, so that when the moment comes when one has to leave *the woods*, it can be done with great pride and honour, at a height greater than that when one first embarked on his journey.

“however to step inside
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Themes for the forthcoming Issues of INSIGHT 2013

Volume 19: Inclusive Teaching **(Expected publication date: Mar 2013)**

Students bring a broad range of unique experiences and backgrounds to the university with a continuum of learning styles and preferences. A group of undergraduates might have numerous visible and invisible differences, including but not limited to religious practices, cultural and linguistic diversity, health and medical conditions, disabilities, age, gender, and sexuality. Inclusive teaching is a move away from 'making adjustments' to meet individual student needs, towards adopting a universal approach to teaching that embraces as many forms of difference as possible. This issue of INSIGHT hopes to provoke discussions on inclusive teaching at the higher education level and also sharing of experiences on the principles of inclusive teaching and the strategies for making teaching and assessment more inclusive.

Volume 20: Fostering Innovation and Leadership in Teaching **(Expected publication date: Jun 2013)**

This issue of INSIGHT looks at how academic staff can investigate their own teaching using a number of methods and sources and use the findings to further develop themselves as scholarly and research-led academic teachers to enhance the student experience and advance their careers. It will also look at possible ways for university to recognise, acknowledges and rewards teaching excellence.

Volume 21: Evaluating Teaching **(Expected publication date: Sep 2013)**

This issue of INSIGHT discusses evaluation and its role in informing teaching and learning. It is an opportunity to develop an understanding of the importance of evaluation of teaching, explore some simple evaluation methods to complement the standard university evaluation instruments, as well as consider the links between evaluation and the values and practices of the reflective professional.

Volume 22: Open Educational Resources – What, Where and How **(Expected publication date: Dec 2013)**

This issue of INSIGHT will address the increasingly popular use of OER in higher education. This issue invites articles based on literature, research and practical experiences that will inform readers on what constitute OER, where can academic staff access them, and how does OER comes about and continues to evolve.



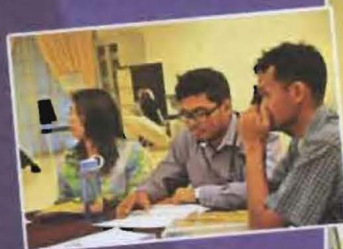


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Happening in 2012



PgDip Cohort 10



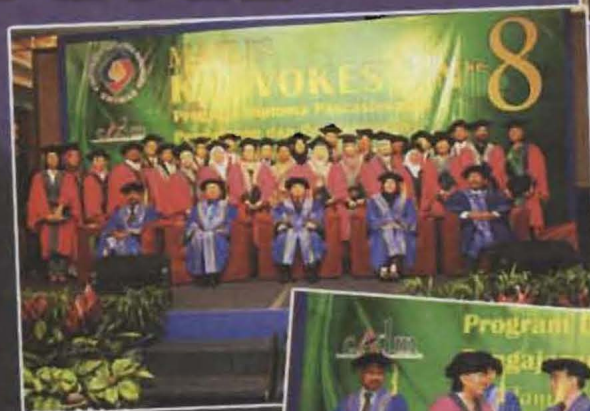
Pre-U Workshop



SCL & PBL Workshops



SCL-PBL Computer-Science Based Disciplines Workshop



8th PgDip Convocation



Academic English Course



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